

Wanna Host Crown or Coronation?

Introduction

Now that there is a rotation schedule in place to help ensure that all regions of the Middle Kingdom have equal access to hosting Crown Tournaments, many more local groups will have a realistic opportunity to put on such events. [*Note: The original document said Coronations and Crowns... a recent law change allows those who win Crown to set their own Coronations... but, the council in this document still applies if your group is approached to do a Coronation by the new Prince/Princess.*] Many groups in our kingdom have shown up in the Pale on a regular basis as hosting such kingdom-level events. These groups' names are familiar to us all because they do appear so often, and they successfully pull off these events with aplomb. Now that efforts are being made to get an increasing number of groups to try their collective hands at this, some may ask, "Now we want to bid on one of those events. What do we need to do? What do we need to know that they already know?"

One of the realities that most of these groups have learned is that in their basic features these events are just like regular events – you need a site, a staff, publicity, supplies, activities, etc. The principle differences come in scale and scope. By scale and scope I mean the size of the event and how elaborately you plan to carry out the expected features of your event. In other words, how fancy you want to get. Probably the simplest way to go about covering this is to go through some steps of putting on an event, and describing how these particular kingdom-level events differ from normal events. There are certain other issues to be considered, but this is not a Complete Anachronist.

Finding a site

This is always the first thing you have to accomplish, and it is one of the two most critical decisions an autocrat/event steward can make. Almost all of your planning hangs directly on the site you choose. As the risk of belaboring the obvious, here are the criteria I use for evaluating a site's suitability:

- **Is the site big enough?** This is about the most basic consideration when selecting a site. While a regular event can expect roughly 200-400 attendees, Kingdom-level events routinely draw 700-800, and every rare once in a while 1000 or more. This means that you need adequate space for all of your activities (courts, heavy and light fighting, merchanting, classes, A&S display/judging, children's activities, feast, dancing, etc.), plus room for a whole lot of people, their gear (including the needs of royalty – see "Hosting Royalty" below) and their cars. The last point is very important. 700-800 people and their gear usually come in a whole lot of cars. Also, your site needs to be large enough to accommodate moving martial activities indoors in case of inclement weather and still accommodate all those people. Adequate space is one of the most common shortcomings for events of this size. You'll need to find space -- and potentially a couple of volunteers -- for one newer activity that has been added in recent years, the Princess Tea. The Princess Tea is hosted by the Rose who stepped down at the previous Coronation. The Rose will provide the food, plates,

utensils, decorations, staff, etc. (assistance from hosting group is always appreciated but not required). The only thing you have to provide is a private room/area with electricity and a few tables and chairs. You should check with the Rose (if you don't know who that is, ask the Royalty's Chamberlain / Chief of Staff) about how many people will need to be seated so you can gauge space and furniture. Access to a kitchen is a bonus. The Princess Tea is held at the same time as the Chivalry meeting which, of course, is usually scheduled very soon after the end of Crown Tourney. The Tea usually lasts one to two hours.

- **What about the “atmosphere”?** Of course we all want to attend events with good period atmosphere. Sometimes we can find sites (very large churches, Masonic halls, some campgrounds, etc.) that naturally have a lot of atmosphere. These are hard to find. Sites large enough to accommodate these events (various educational facilities, fairgrounds, etc.) usually are somewhat lacking in atmosphere. More often it will be up to the group to try to create an atmosphere.
- **Is the site we want available in the time frame we want?** Limited availability of large sites is one of the reasons the rotation schedule was created. Sites capable of accommodating kingdom-level events are hard to find, and are usually booked in advance – sometimes as much as two years in advance. If your region is scheduled to host Fall Crown Tournament two years from now, for example, the time to be shopping around for sites is now, or at least very soon. You might get lucky, but luck is not something to rely on.
- **Can we afford this site?** Large sites with good atmospheres can be expensive. Large sites without much atmosphere can be less expensive, but you might add expense with decorations. Your group has to decide what you can afford based on an expected attendance of 700-800 (see “Establishing and maintaining a budget” below) and what you can reasonably charge as a site fee without driving down attendance. Don't forget that there may be some additional charges for personnel required by the site (usually an hourly wage per person) that must also be taken into consideration when calculating the site cost.

Your staff and staffing issues

This is the other most critical decision of any event plan. In my opinion, a Kingdom level event is not the time to give an inexperienced person experience by giving them a major position on your staff. Key positions like autocrat/event steward, troll/gatekeeper, feastocrat/head cook, royalty liaison, merchant coordinator, marshal-in-charge, A&S coordinator, herald-in-charge and volunteer coordinator should go those who have either done these jobs before or who have extensive experience in other areas of event staffing. Less experienced volunteers can be asked to assist these people, learn in the process and apply their new-found experience to the next event. In fact, I think that a deputy system is great for staffing kingdom-level events because it a) increases the number of capable people with the experience for the future; and b) allows people to ‘try out’ a staffing job to see if it's really for them.

When you have an event this big, your staff is also of necessity, large. Maintaining lines of communication between the autocrat and the staff and among the staffers is essential. Begin meeting regularly as a group at least five or six months in advance of the event and meet more often as the event approaches. Insist that they keep the autocrat apprised of developments in their areas so that no one has any nasty surprises with which to deal. The issue of scale I mentioned earlier can also apply to nasty surprises.

Establishing (and maintaining) a budget

This can be a tricky part of any event. Rather than go through all the mechanics of setting projected finances for a kingdom-level event (or any event, for that matter), again I will point out a few key issues.

- **Be conservative!** If you think you're going to have 700 in attendance, budget for 500.
- **Watch your outward flow of money.** It can slip away and get out of hand very quickly. Set low-to-moderate but realistic budgets for individual staffers. Allotting most people more than they really need for their job encourages overspending. Insist that the autocrat clear *all* expenditures above the original allotments, and *insist* on receipts – no receipts, no reimbursements. Any expenses without receipts are considered donations to your group.
- **Glamour costs, but is it worth it?** If your site is long on atmosphere and visual interest, then your site decoration budget doesn't necessarily have to be high. As mentioned before, though, some sites will need help. How much "flash" factor you want is up to your group. How fancy do you want the site tokens? Do you want a site program? How fancy? You'll have at least one court. How do you want to decorate the court staging area? How much decoration in the feast hall? Remember that some of what you buy will be capital improvements for your group, and much will be disposable. You can also contact the Minister of Regalia, who has lots of stuff available for loan for dressing up your site.
- **Extra expenditures will come up.** By this I mean expenses that you might not expect based on hosting regular events. Some of these are associated with hosting royalty (see "Hosting Royalty" below) but there are others: the abovementioned "glamour" and capital improvements, etc. Try to control your fiscal outlay, but don't freak out when expenses you hadn't planned on come up, or things turn out to cost more than you had anticipated. Try to work towards a compromise between the two extremes.

Putting in a bid: What do they want?

The new regional rotation system will not necessarily do away with the need for submitting bids. Even if the groups of a region get together and decide who can 'take' a given event, an event plan will need to be submitted for approval, especially if your group will need a loan from Curia (funds are available for this purpose). Kingdom-level

event bids need to be submitted to the Kingdom Seneschal and the First Deputy Seneschal. The Kingdom Seneschal will then take the responsibility for presenting the bids and plans to the Royalty and to Curia for consideration and approval.

There are certain logical essentials that should always be included in your bid for a kingdom-level event. Most of these are what you'd expect in your average Pale ad, but there are other elements as well.

These include:

Event hosting the event

Event date/alternate date available

Site address, opening and closing times

Alcohol and smoking policies

Scheduled events

Names and contact information of key staff

Preliminary budget broken down by:

- anticipated revenues through fees
- anticipated expenses (site, feast, supplies, publicity, printing, mailing, phoning, royalty, etc.)
- cushion for unforeseen expenditures

You can get as basic or as elaborate as you want in the paperwork. If you know that other groups are going to be bidding against your group for the same event, give those making the decision as much information as possible, making your bid as attractive as you can – describe the advantages of the site, add directions to the site, local hotel information (see “Accommodations” below), etc. Some groups even include photos and/or video of their chosen site.

Curia accepted your bid – great! Now what?

Immediately contact your local seneschal and alert your group. Review your staffing/organizational plan and call your first full staff meeting as soon as possible. Have your Royalty Liaison contact the Royalty Family to find out what Their special needs are and what They want for Their event. This person should maintain regular contact with Them. Contact and maintain contact with the Kingdom Seneschal about special needs for the event. Your event may include a Curia meeting, for example, or the Seneschal may request table space. Contact any other pertinent Kingdom officers – the Earl Marshal for Crown Tournaments, the Kingdom MOAS for Kingdom A&S, etc. Remember to treat your Kingdom officers well... they work hard for you and will work hard with you.

Accommodations

When you have 700-800 people coming in to attend a kingdom-level event, a great number of them will need someplace to stay. This is especially true of Spring Crown Tourney/Kingdom A&S since it is a two day event. The wonderful SCA tradition of ‘crashing’ will support some of your anticipated attendees, but obviously not all. Although it is not strictly required, you do a welcome service for your guests by

investigating and publishing local hotel information in your Pale ad and your seneschal flyers.

Contact hotels/motels in the vicinity of your event *as soon as* you have a confirmed site and date. Do this as early as possible in case mundane events in town that same weekend might take up hotel space. You should ask for blocks of rooms if the hotel in question will do it, and make it clear that the incoming guest will make individual reservations and be responsible for their own bills. Try to get hotels in a range of prices to give people choices. Sometimes if you ask you can get special event rates and other perks thrown in. It never hurts to ask. Publish the hotel name, phone number, price, block cut-off date and any other important information. People *will* appreciate it.

Hosting Royalty

Guaranteed attendance and participation by Royalty of the Midrealm (and possibly Royalty from other Realms) is one of the major differences distinguishing the Kingdom level event. There are basically three levels to choose from when dealing with Royalty at your event: 1) the basics; 2) routinely customary courtesies; and 3) the ultimate.

“The basics” include:

- maintaining regular communications with the pertinent Royalty to try to accommodate Their wishes (Coronations and Crown Tourneys are *Their* events, after all...)
- not charging Royalty site or feast fees
- providing a private room (“Royalty Room”) for the Royalty to stow Their gear, change, eat lunch, conduct business, have some private time, etc.
- offering the services of the Royalty liaison on-site
- offering crash space
- providing reserved parking close to the building
- finding out before the event any dietary restrictions for feast from the Royalty and;
- providing simple snacks and drinks for Royalty and Their retainers

“Routinely customary courtesies” include:

- all of the above;
- offering to find hotel accommodations to Their specifications, and perhaps agree to split the cost;
- providing extra space for meetings and scribes (who are working with Royalty)
- providing a luncheon for the Royalty and their retainers
- not charging visiting Royalty site and feast fees; and
- providing additional staff from the local group for schlepping gear, guarding the Royalty room, etc.

“The Ultimate” includes:

- all of the above;
- finding and paying for Royalty hotel accommodations

- bringing site waivers to the Royalty room so that They and Their retainers don't have to stand in lines
- forming the local assistance to the Royals into a more formal 'honor guard' with some sort of uniform, polearms, etc.
- Flowers decorating the Royalty room; and
- Any other courtesy or comfort your group can think of.

Miscellaneous tips

These are a few more little ideas that can help make kingdom-level events run a bit easier and more efficiently. I couldn't figure out where else to put them.

- Having a volunteer coordinator (at HRM Kenna's Coronation, ours was dubbed Leader of the "Brute Squad") is a great plus for organizing all those aspects that require people willing to pitch in – directing parking, setting up and breaking down merchants, night-before set-up, post-event clean-up, etc.
- Handheld radios are a definite plus if they fit into your budget. Kingdom level events require large sites which tend to have lots of things going on in lots of areas, and finding key staff fast is greatly facilitated by radio communications.
- If you can find a feastocrat who's willing, try to have a feast that seats 200-250. When your crowd is 700-800, that still leaves a lot of people who find dinner on their own. On that subject, making up maps to area restaurants and contacting them for sample menus, any price breaks for SCAdians, etc. is another great service for the majority of people who will not get to eat feast. Compile a three-ring binder of restaurant information to put out at the Information Table along with the maps.
- Have a designated runner who knows the area around the site for going out to get or do things during the day if necessary.
- Even if you don't have an event program, have a site map. With events this large and lots of various activities going on in all areas of the site, it's easier for people to find things themselves than it is to give individual directions to 700-800 people.

Conclusion

I hope this helps to de-mystify some aspects of hosting kingdom-level events and makes the prospect less daunting. There are lots of other ideas and tips that I haven't included for the sake of space, but this is intended to be an encouragement, not a manual. If you think your group might be interested in stepping up to the plate, please share this with them. The ideas they'll come up with on their own will amaze you.

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